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AUTHOR Peak, Grahame
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ABSTRACT

Events in the development of competency standards for the teaching profession in Australia are documented, including publishing articles and reports, conducting conferences, commissioning sets of standards, validating support for the competency framework, and promoting of standards by government and professional organizations. Competency-based approaches are also being promoted in Australia's vocational education and training sector as the way to increase the quality and quantity of workplace skills which in turn will lead to higher productivity and profitability. Issues that are being raised in the out-of-school vocational training sector, which may be relevant to colleagues associated with teacher education in the school sector, are discussed. These include definitions of competency; the relationship between competency standards and the curriculum; how competency is assessed; where assessment should take place and who should be the assessors; the need to recognize expertise and excellence; how assessment should be recorded and who should keep the records of competencies and qualifications; and the implications of this for industrial relations. (Contains 60 references.) (JDD)

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NATIONAL COMPETENCY STANDARDS FOR THE TEACHING PROFESSION: LESSONS FROM OUT-OF-SCHOOL

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Grahame Peak
School of Adult Vocational Education
University of Technology, Sydney

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NATIONAL COMPETENCY STANDARDS FOR THE TEACHING PROFESSION : LESSONS FROM OUT-OF-SCHOOL

Grahame Peak
School of Adult Vocational Education
University of Technology, Sydney

At an earlier conference of the Australian Teacher Education Association a paper was presented on aspects of competency standards for training and development personnel developed by the Training and Development Lead Body (TDLB) and endorsed by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVR) and the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC) in the United Kingdom, and competency standards developed by the Competency Standards Body (CSB) for Workplace Trainers and endorsed by the National Training Board (NTB) in Australia, which were considered relevant to national competency standards being developed for teachers as part of the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning (NPQTL) (Peak, 1992). At the same conference there was a Teacher Education Policy Forum on national standards for the teaching profession at which, among others, Leo Bartlett (1992) spoke on lessons from the professions for the development of teacher competencies, and Glen Evans (1992) on competence, competency and the knowledge base of teachers. Later these presentations and others from the Competency Symposium at the Ballina conference were published together with a lead article by Len Cairns (1992).

More recently, the Australian College of Education has published a collection of articles, which includes some by ATE Association members, on the competencies debate in Australian education and training (Collins, 1993). In this collection Barbara Preston and Jim Walker (1993) have pointed out the inconsistency between the format of competency standards and the Australian Standards Framework (ASF) proposed by the NTB, on one hand, and the holistic approach to competencies which assumes the coherent and structured nature of

knowledge (and other attributes) required for the work of teachers, on the other. They illustrate this point by the competencies required of a secondary science teacher. Christine Deer (1993) has documented recent activities in the development of areas of competence for beginning teachers by the NSW Ministerial Advisory Council on Teacher Education and the Quality of Teaching (MACTEQT). Issues concerning competency standards for beginning teachers discussed by MACTEQT have included: how would they be used? who would assess them? how could their validity and reliability be assured across employers? what training would be provided for assessors? how would standards be enforced?

At the time of the Ballina conference the work program of the NPQTL on the development of national competency standards for teaching was being guided by a general rationale and conceptual approach contained in a paper prepared by Jim Walker (1992). At about this time, also, the NPQTL Working Party on Professional Preparation and Career Development commissioned three complementary consultations to develop sets of competency standards for beginning teachers. Drawing on the contributions from the consultants and other materials, the Working Party developed an illustration of the competencies for beginning teachers and recommended further development of this competency framework which eventually would lead to a validation study (NPQTL, 1992). Both a trial validation and validation of the draft competency framework for teaching have been conducted (which involved ATE Association members), and appropriate refinements are being made to the framework. The next stage is to develop standards of competent performance to accompany the competency framework. It was claimed that the purpose of these standards is "to inform the assessment or approval of teachers' performance and inform their ongoing professional development" (Peacock, 1993).

Workshop participants in the trial validation study agreed that the framework was useful for making teaching explicit, promoting collaborative analysis or debate, and promoting teachers' professional learning and development but not useful for inferring standards of competence. There was concern about the use of the framework: most accepted its use to support the ongoing professional development of teachers but opposed its use for industrial purposes. Participants made a distinction between appraisal for personal development and assessment for industrial purposes. The cases were not considered useful in inferring standards of competence. It was suggested that there be more cases in order to provide more examples of contexts and teaching situations as well as to illustrate the complexity of teaching. These cases should be seen as examples rather than exemplars of teaching (Peacock & Louden, 1993).

The validation study indicated overwhelming support for continued development of the competency framework. Again, the framework was perceived as less useful for inferring standards of competence than for promoting teachers' professional learning and development. There was some support for the idea of continua of standards rather than a dichotomy. Some participants opposed the use of the framework for inferring standards of competence. It was generally agreed that the "indicators of effective practice" for elements were not indicative of any particular standard but were understood to be another level of descriptive detail. As in the trial validation study, workshop participants supported the inclusion of case studies, asked for more case studies to show different levels of teaching, and considered them to be examples rather than illustrations of best practice. Among the recommendations by the validation team were that the framework be refined, that its purposes be more exactly defined, that its potential uses (for initial teacher education, for making explicit what teachers do, for teacher review appraisal and for teacher professional development) be explored through trial projects, and that further

development and validation of standards is needed before the framework could be used for selecting teachers for permanency, inability procedures or teacher assessments (Stoessinger, Louden & McRae, 1993).

The work of the NPQTL has been reported by Sharan Burrow (1993), Federal President, Australian Teachers' Union, who sees the challenge for the education community as reflected in questions such as:

> Are we mature enough as a profession to demystify the nature of our work, to define and promote its richness and complexity, and hence to establish the standards by which we can guarantee our students quality assurance? Is it possible to determine National Competency Standards for the teaching profession without being trapped by the reductionist experience of the fifties? (p.111).

Competency-Based Approach in Vocational Education and Training

The competency-based approach has been promoted in the vocational education and training sector as the way to increase the quality and quantity of workplace skills which in turn will lead to higher productivity and profitability, and eventually improve the international competitiveness of our nation. Competency-based training and assessment has by now become well embedded in the National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA). For example, under the National Framework for Recognition of Training (NFROT) only those courses will be accredited which are able to identify the outcomes of courses as competencies (VEETAC, 1993). Within the Australian Vocational Certificate Training System (AVCTS) each certificate level is to be achieved on a competency basis (ESFC, 1992) with each pathway to include the Mayer key employment-related competencies and the NTB vocational competencies. The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) has as part of its national priority, the advancement of a national identity for the vocational education and

training system, a strategy which will further the implementation of key training reforms such as competency-based training (ANTA, 1993), while the NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training (NSW BVET) has as a state priority the development, implementation and promotion of national vocational education and training reforms which include competency-based training (NSW BVET, 1993).

In the Ballina paper I drew from experiences arising from the development of competency standards for workplace trainers and professionals to raise some issues relevant to the development of competency standards for the teaching profession. Such issues included the atomistic versus holistic nature of competency; whether there should be one or more sets of competency standards for teachers depending on position in career path; and possible uses of competency standards for teachers. Now I would like to share with my colleagues in school teacher education some issues that have arisen over recent years in the debate on competency-based training and assessment within the vocational education and training sector.

A number of national and international conferences concerning, either directly or indirectly, competency-based training and assessment in the vocational education and training sector have taken place over recent years. Among the earliest were "Assessment and Standards in Vocational Education and Training" sponsored by the then TAFE National Centre for Research and Development (1990), and "Competency-Based Training" sponsored by both the TAFE National Centre for Research and Development and the National Centre for Competency-Based Training (1991). These were followed by the international conference "What Future for Technical and Vocational Education and Training?" and national conference "Testing Times" sponsored by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) (1992, 1993), the "National Assessment

Research Forum" managed by New South Wales TAFE Commission under the guidance of the Assessment Steering Group of the VEETAC CBT Working Party (1993) and the international conference "After Competency: The Future of Post-Compulsory Education" sponsored by the Centre for Skill Formation Research and Development of the Faculty of Education, Griffith University (1993). There have also been local conferences/workshops, for example, the symposia "Defining, Developing and Assessing Higher Order Competencies in the Professions" (Scott, 1992) and "Competency-Based Standards - The Challenge of Assessment" sponsored by the School of Adult Vocational Education of the University of Technology, Sydney (Hager & Chappell, 1992). Of particular relevance for participants is the paper by Chappell (1992) on the application of competency standards to teacher education. He argues that an integrated approach to the development of competency standards rather than the reductionist approach characteristic of the earlier competency-based teacher education (CBTE) movement has benefits for initial teacher education and continuing professional development.

Recent summaries of issues associated with competency-based vocational education and training range from an article written by a University of Technology, Sydney colleague and former ATE Association member (Watson, 1993) to a report prepared by the Professional Development Centre, University of New South Wales for the NSW Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board (NSW VETAB, 1994).

Today, I intend to present for discussion some of the issues being raised in the out-of-school sector, namely, vocational education and training, which may be relevant to colleagues associated with teacher education in the school sector. They include : What is competency? What is the relationship between competency standards and the curriculum? How is competency assessed?

Where should assessment take place? Who should be the assessors? Should expertise and excellence be recognised? How should assessment be recorded? Who keeps the records of competencies and qualifications ? What about qualifications ? What are the implications for industrial relations?

What is competency?

According to the National Training Board (NTB, 1992) a competency comprises "the specification of knowledge and skills and the application of that knowledge and skill within an occupation or industry level, to the standard of performance required in employment" (p.29). This is a broad concept of competency in that it includes all aspects of work performance such as task skills, task management skills, contingency management skills and job/role environment skills. This model has been imported from the United Kingdom where it represents the official position of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ, 1991). The format of the competency standards comprises units of competency, elements of competency, performance criteria, range of variables statement and evidence guide (the latter being optional). The content covers the four components of competency, and incorporates in addition to skills, knowledge and understanding underpinning performance, and values and attitudes. Issues that have arisen in regard format and content of standards include : what constitutes a unit of competency? must a unit include all four components of competency? how are units comparable? how are vocational "generic competencies" (e.g. occupational health and safety, and industrial relations) and key competencies related to occupational units of competency? Thompson (1993) argues that the existing format does not give sufficient guidance in the identification of knowledge underpinning performance. However, the recent addition of the evidence guide to the standards format may reduce this difficulty.

The model of competence for professionals endorsed by the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR) is the integrated approach proposed by my colleagues at the University of Technology, Sydney which includes three components, namely, attributes (knowledge, skills and attitudes), performance and standards. This approach integrates both attributes and performance into a single framework. A competent professional has the attributes necessary for job performance to appropriate standards. Competency, then, is a combination of attributes underlying some aspect of successful professional performance (Gonczi, 1993; Gonczi, Hager & Oliver, 1990; Hager & Gonczi, 1993; Heywood, Gonczi & Hager, 1992). This approach appears to be consistent with the integrated approach to analysing teaching which is supported by the NPQTL (1992). However, it should be noted that Preston and Walker (1993) are critical of the integrated approach of the UTS group in that it accepts the NTB format of competency standards which does not allow for a coherent structured knowledge base underlying a set of standards, only knowledge in reference to each separate unit of competency or element of competency.

What is the relationship between competency standards and the curriculum?

In the competency-based approach to vocational education and training competency standards provide the basis for the curriculum. Competency standards describe the outcomes without identifying the means of achieving the outcomes while curriculum documents describe the process by which outcomes will be achieved. One issue in the vocational education and training sector at the moment is the extent to which there is a one-to-one correspondence between modules and units of competency, learning outcomes and elements of competency, and assessment criteria and performance criteria. It has been pointed out that a module may involve knowledge, skills and attitudes which cut across a number of elements, and even a number of units of competency.

Further, a curriculum may present learning outcomes which may have no direct relationship with any units/elements of competency (Gonczi, 1993; Ramsey, 1993). Therefore, a problem that competency standards causes for curriculum developers is the degree to which modular courses can remain effective within a competency-based vocational education and training context (Hager, 1993).

Another point is that the competency-based approach in vocational education needs a coherent curriculum which integrates all learning whether gained with an off-the-job education/training provider or on-the-job in the workplace. However, the provision of on-the-job experiences within the curriculum raises industrial and resourcing issues (VEETAC CBT Working Party, Steering Group, 1993).

How is competency assessed?

Evidence is normally collected through a combination of methods grouped according to whether they provide performance evidence (natural observation in the workplace, extracted examples from the workplace, simulations) or supplementary evidence (oral and/or written questioning). A third category is evidence from prior achievements (reports, certificates, experiences, informal courses). Good practice requires performance evidence to be supplemented, where possible, by supporting evidence of interpinning knowledge and understanding (NCVQ, 1991).

The agreed position is that assessment is a holistic rather than atomistic process. It is recommended that rather than collecting one piece of evidence for each performance criterion on each element of competency one should use an integrated approach involving methods which provide evidence for a number of performance criteria over one or more elements (and even units) of competency

simulaneously. Also, it is suggested that more than one source of evidence be used for each assessment. This integrated or holistic approach also serves to bring together skills, knowledge and understanding, attitudes and values and so on (Gonczi, 1993; Gonczi, Hager & Athanasou, 1993).

Where should assessment take place?

In that assessment concerns performance against competency standards required in the workplace the assessment of performance should occur in the workplace or under conditions which approximate those of the workplace (VEETAC Working Party on the Implementation of Competency-Based Training, 1992). Other points in favour of workplace assessment are that it is realistic, it offers the opportunity for continuous assessment, and it is performed by supervisors who have some expertise in the task being assessed (McDonald, 1993). Some argue that the final assessment of competency can only occur in the workplace because only industry can assess performance to industry standards (Casey, 1993). Similarly, it has been argued that as the performance to industry competency standards requires on-the-job training and experience in addition to off-the-job education and training, the assessment of competency must wait until after industry experience whether assessment takes place in the workplace or in the education/training institution (Porter, 1993). Problems with workplace assessment include the burden placed on supervisors, time demands on assessor and assessee, disruption of work flow, potential for damaging workplace relationships, and lack of supervisor expertise in assessment (McDonald, 1993). It has been argued that in keeping with the notion of integrated and holistic assessment the gathering of evidence should not be limited to either a training institution or the workplace (Toop, 1993). The strengths and weaknesses of assessment based on samples of performance in an educational institution or natural observation in the workplace have been documented by Watson (1994).

Who should be the assessors?

It is agreed that the responsibility for assessment rests with the registered provider whether it be public, commercial, industry, enterprise or community (VEETAC, 1993; NSW VETAB, 1992). In that there may be a requirement for evidence of performance to the standard expected in the workplace, training providers may not be able to assess the full set of competencies needed for certification. At the National Research Assessment Forum several assessment arrangements were proposed for an off-the-job provider: for example, TAFE could issue its own certificates which can be accepted or supplemented by industry/enterprise, could form a partnership with industry/enterprise, or could issue a probationary certificate with industry/enterprise making the final assessment decision (VEETAC CBT Working Party, Steering Group, 1993a).

Persons who may be assessors are teachers/trainers employed by public and private education/training providers, and supervisors and managers in the workplace. Casey (1993) claims that workplace supervisors and managers are the most appropriate people to assess competencies. The Competency Standards Body (CSB) for Assessors and Workplace Trainers (1993) states that assessors are required to demonstrate knowledge of the subject under assessment, the competency standards or learning outcomes to be demonstrated, and current industry practices for the job against which performance is being assessed.

Should expertise and excellence be recognised?

It is accepted that the adoption of a graded assessment scheme which gives substance to the pursuit of excellence is legitimate within a competency-based assessment system (Gonczi, Hager & Athanasou, 1993). There are various

sources of excellence and hence criteria for the assignment of grades. Some suggested sources/criteria include speed of performance, additional work and learning outcomes, outstanding motivation and attributes such as creativity and flair (Peddie, 1993). Grading has its pros and cons (Byrne, 1993). Benefits for employers would be the provision of information by education/training providers which would guide in the selection, promotion and compensation of personnel. However, industry participants in the VEETAC CBT National Assessment Research Project workshop stated that graded workplace assessment was not required as there was no need to highlight the performance of one employee against the other. Achievement in industry can be recognised by other means, for example, greater status, higher pay and faster promotion (VEETAC CBT Working Party Steering Group, 1993b).

The question remains : Does a graded assessment system fit more comfortably with the measurement paradigm than it does with the evidence-based paradigm (VEETAC CBT Working Party, Steering Group 1993a).

How should assessment be recorded?

It is recommended that achievement be recorded in terms of unit of competency achieved towards a credential (for an accredited course) or a statement of attainment (for a registered program) (NTB, 1992; VEETAC, 1992). This is consistent with overseas practice where the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) uses a National Record of Achievement (NRA), a summary of and individual's progress containing a statement of qualifications and unit credits as well as other achievements (e.g. school) and experiences (e.g. workplace), and an action plan, and the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC) has a Record of Education and Training (RET), a cumulative record of achievement, which shows achievements in terms of modules, units and

awards. It was agreed at the National Assessment Research Workshop that in Australia the smallest formal reporting component of assessment of competency should be at the unit of competency level and recorded as competent or not yet competent (in the workplace) and at the learning outcome level and recorded as satisfactory or not yet satisfactory (in an educational institution) (VEETAC, 1993b).

Who keeps the records of competencies and qualifications held by trainers?

A more contentious issue concerns the location of the records of individuals. While there is consensus that there should be a personal record held by the individual which could be updated there is not unanimous agreement on the idea of a unified national record keeping system with the individual's progressive achievements recorded and held in a central data base (VEETAC, 1993a).

A related issued is whether it is the responsibility of the individual or training body for keeping records of competencies and qualifications held by individuals. While it is desirable that individuals have ownership of their records, recognition authorities consider it to be the responsibility of providers for maintaining records of the achievement of individuals. In fact NSW VETAB (1992) requires those training providers seeking accreditation to keep student records in two locations for 30 years. However, VEETAC (1992b) places responsibility with State/Territory training authorities or their delegated agents for maintaining consolidated competency records of individuals and recommends that individuals be provided periodically with updated transcripts of their records. The NTB (1992) maintains national registers for competency standards, accredited courses, recognised training programs and registered training providers but not records of achievement of competencies by

individuals.

From the National Assessment Research Forum came a number of issues associated with devising an appropriate record keeping and reporting system. These include making decisions about "who maintains the system, and the mechanics of entering and recording information, issuing updated records to individuals and other interested parties, long term storage of records, system security and confidentiality" (VEETAC, 1993a, p51) Questions were also asked at the National Assessment Research Workshop (VEETAC, 1993b) such as: What will be the cost of recording and maintaining records at the national level? Who should have access to the information? What quality control mechanism will be implemented?

What about qualifications ?

According to the NTB (1992) certification is the recognition given for successful achievement of competency, whether it be one or more units. Certification may be in the form of the award of the credential or a statement of attainment. A credential refers to certification given in recognition of successful gaining of a defined set of competencies which relate to the Australian Standards Framework (ASF); while a statement of attainment is given in recognition of achievement of one or more units of competency (usually the components of a recognised training program) that form a subset of those units required for a credential. Under NTB policy and guidelines it is possible for groups of units of competency to be aligned to any of the 8 levels of the ASF in accordance with NTB descriptors which differentials levels (NTB, 1993). The level to which units have been aligned determines the qualification as contained in the new national Qualifications Framework. Heywood, Gonczi & Hager (1992) suggest that ASF levels 7 and 8, the levels to which groups of competencies for professionals align, may need to be sub-divided into sub-levels to allow for varying experience of

graduates.

Are there implications for industrial relations?

Within this context the first question which comes to mind concerns the purpose for which competency standards are being developed. According to a British commentator standards, as the basis of competency-based assessment, may be used for a number of purposes the main ones being for certification, performance appraisal, identification of training needs and accreditation of prior learning (Fletcher, 1992). Standards developed by the Training and Development Lead Body (TDLB, 1991) and endorsed by the NCVR and SCOTVEC have been used for the design of qualifications (e.g. NVQs/SVQs), job description, recruitment and selection, training of trainers, staff development, performance appraisal and review of training strategies and practices within an organisation. In Australia the Competency Standards Body for Workplace Trainers suggests that standards endorsed by the NTB may be used as a basis for job design, classifications agreed by industrial parties, recruitment and selection, development and evaluation of train-the-trainer courses, and the development of enterprise strategies (CSB for Workplace Trainers, 1991).

It must be remembered, as mentioned earlier, that the push for the development and implementation of national competency standards came from within the context of industrial reform. In particular award restructuring involved among other things the establishment of hierarchies of skill levels which are now able to be provided by the Australian Standards Framework (ASF). Once these were in place, pay levels were to be related to competency standards within the ASF. There appears to be a number of problems in this area : for example, individuals may be at pay levels higher than skill levels due to other inclusions within industrial awards (Thomson, 1992). Also, another issue concerns whether an

employer should pay for skills acquired but not used. The difficulties in the area of industrial relations have led the National Training Board to withdraw from any responsibility in creating linkages between ASF levels and industrial award classifications (NTB, 1992).

The introduction of competency standards into the workplace raises other industrial relations issues. Davis (1993a, 1993b) mentions the possible conflict between management and unions over the issue of skills used versus skills possessed. Its resolution may require the establishment of appropriate benchmarks. Another issue concerns the selection of assessors in that employees have fears about the potential bias of assessors and possible hidden agendas in the assessment process. A third issue is centred on access of employees to assessment. Negotiations may be needed concerning the number of times employees could seek assessment or be required to undertake assessment. Fourth, consideration has to be given to the establishment of an appeals mechanism within the system.

Conclusion

We have looked at some issues that have arisen with the development and implementation of competency-based training and assessment in the vocational education and training sector. Now we might discuss the implications of these out-of-school experiences for the development and implementation of national competency standards for the teaching profession. These include : What are the real purposes and uses of the competency standards for teaching? How will assessment be done? How best can off-the-job (teacher education institution) and on-the-job (school) assessment be integrated? Who are to be the assessors in the schools? What are the industrial relations implications of school-based assessment?

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